

PREPARATION
FOR
THE MYSTERY
OF HOLY CONFESSION



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Thy will, neither kept I Thy commandments. Now, therefore, I bow the knee of my heart, beseeching Thee of grace. I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I acknowledge mine iniquities. Wherefore, I humbly beseech Thee: Forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with mine iniquities. Be not angry with me for ever, by reserving evils for me, neither condemn me into the nethermost parts of the earth. For Thou the God, even the God of them that repent, and in me Thou wilt show all Thy goodness; for Thou wilt save me that am unworthy, according to Thy great mercy; and I will praise Thee for ever, all the days of my life. For all the power of the Heavens doth praise Thee, and Thine is the glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

From *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by Saint John Climacus

Step 25:60. On the destroyer of the passions, most sublime humility, which is rooted in spiritual perception:

I find that Manasses sinned as no other man has sinned by defiling the temple of God with idols and contaminating all the Divine worship. If the whole world had undertaken a fast for him, it could have made no return for this. But humility had power to remedy even what was incurable in him. If Thou hadst desired sacrifice I would have given it, says David to God; but Thou wilt not be pleased with whole-burnt sacrifices, that is with bodies consumed by fasting. The sacrifice for God – and everyone knows what follows.

[What follows is the rest of the verse from the fiftieth Psalm, “A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled God will not despise” (Psalm 50:17).]



❖ PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION ❖

DURING GREAT LENT, and the other fasts of the Church Year, it is customary for all Orthodox Christians to go to confession to their priest. Properly this should be done at the very least several times a year, the exact frequency depending upon how often one is blessed to receive the Holy Mysteries and on the counsel and blessing of one's spiritual father. As a preparation for this sacramental confession and to help one examine one's conscience before coming to confession, the following questions are sometimes distributed in parishes and, although, of course, the list is not exhaustive, it may be a help to those of our readers who are Orthodox Christians.

Sins Against God

Do you pray to God in the morning and evening, before and after meals?

During prayer have you allowed your thoughts to wander?

Have you rushed your prayers? or when reading in church?

Do you read the Scriptures daily? Do you read other spiritual writings regularly?

Have you read books whose content is not Orthodox or even anti-Orthodox, or is spiritually damaging?

Have you attended a heterodox prayer service?

Have you attended a church of the ecumenistic Orthodox?

Have you pronounced the name of God without reverence, joking? Have you asked God's help before starting every activity?

Have you made the sign of the Cross carelessly, thoughtlessly? Have you sworn? Have you murmured against God?

Have you sinned by forgetting God?

Have you been slack in attending church?

Have you consecrated the feast days, particularly Sundays and the Twelve Great Feasts, to God?

Have you tried your best to attend church on these days? or have you spent them as though they were ordinary days?

If unable to attend church for some reason, have you nonetheless tried to devote some part of these days to prayer and spiritual reading?

Have you joined with people not of the Orthodox Christian Faith in prayer, or attended their worship services?

Have you kept the fasts?

Have you behaved irreverently in church, or before the clergy and monastics?

Have you laughed or talked in church, or moved about unnecessarily, thus also distracting other people from prayer?

Have you dressed immodestly or in an unbecoming manner when attending church?

Do you ignore the exhortations of your priest regarding proper attire in church?

Have you tried to pay reverent attention to the readings, hymns, and prayers in church?

Have you striven to pray during the service, crossing yourself, etc., or have you rather simply stood and day-dreamed?

Have you prepared for the services beforehand, looking up the Scriptural readings, making sure you have the texts to follow the service etc., especially if the service will be in a language you do not readily understand?

Have you ever left church after the Divine Services, and partic-

us. Even if we should seem to have failed with regard to all the aforementioned points and more, we should not lose heart but confess our sins without reservation, we should regret the wrongs we have done, be resolved to make amends, and receive whatever remedy our confessor should be guided to lay upon us. Most of all, one should be assured of the blessing of God which these endeavors will bring upon you.

THE PRAYER OF MANASSES, KING OF JUDAH

O Lord Almighty, the God of our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of their righteous seed; Who hast made heaven and earth, with all the ornament thereof; Who hast bound the sea by the work of Thy commandment; Who hast shut up the deep, and sealed it by Thy terrible and glorious Name; Whom all things fear, and tremble before the face of Thy power; for the majesty of Thy glory cannot be borne, nor can the wrathfulness of Thy threatening toward sinners be endured: but the mercy of Thy promise is unmeasurable and unsearchable, for Thou art the Most High Lord, Who is compassionate, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy, and dost repent at the evils of men. Thou, O Lord, according to Thy great goodness, hast promised repentance and forgiveness to them that have sinned against Thee, and by the multitude of Thy compassions, hast appointed repentance unto sinners, that they may be saved. Thou, therefore, O Lord God of Hosts, hast not appointed repentance to the just, to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, which have not sinned against Thee; but Thou hast appointed repentance unto me that am a sinner, for I have sinned above the number of the sands of the sea. Mine iniquities are multiplied, O Lord, mine iniquities are multiplied, and I am not worthy to behold and see the height of heaven for the multitude of my transgressions. I am bowed down with many iron bands, that I cannot lift my head, neither have any release, for I have provoked Thy wrath, and done evil in Thy sight; I did not

Have you watched television too much or indiscriminately? Have you given yourself up to any other similar pastime that wastes your time and energy and might have harmed you?

Have you been greedy, either with regard to food or to possessions?

Have you indulged in overeating? Have you become accustomed to eating between meals?

Have you been picky about your food, or wasteful of foods, forgetting that so many people are without proper nourishment? Have you been extravagant? Have you been wasteful?

Do you care for and seek first the salvation of your soul, the spiritual life and the kingdom of God, or have you placed earthly considerations above all others?

Is there any other sin, which burdens your conscience, or which you are ashamed to tell?



Anyone preparing for confession must ask God to help his resolve to tell all his sins. A penitent should prepare for confession and collect his thoughts regarding his sins at least a day before confession. The most valuable thing in the eyes of God is the confession of the sin which weighs most on the conscience.

The questions listed are intended to help the Orthodox Christian examine himself and identify the symptoms of his spiritual ills; they should not be taken as some kind of test to ascertain how well we are doing as if there was a certain "pass-mark." Before God's perfection, we shall always fail. It is for that reason that, as believing Christians, we throw ourselves on the mercy of the Lord and do not trust in our own righteousness.

Remember that our sins can never outweigh God's love towards

ularly after receiving the Holy Mysteries, and immediately engaged in light talk and thus forgotten the blessings and graces you have received?

Have you been ashamed of your Faith or the sign of the Cross in the presence of others?

Have you made a show of your piety for the sake of ostentation?

Have you used your Orthodox Faith or its teachings merely to browbeat others or belittle them?

Have you believed in dreams, fortune telling, astrology, signs and other superstitions?

Do you give thanks to the Lord for all things?

Have you stolen from God by failing to tithe?

Have you neglected to support your church by your labors?

Have you ever doubted God's providence concerning yourself?

Do you at least try to perceive His purpose in all the things that come upon you?

Sins Against Your Neighbors

Do you respect and obey your parents?

Have you offended them by rudeness or contradiction?

Have you insulted anyone?

Have you quarreled or fought with anyone? Have you hit anyone?

Are you always respectful to old people?

Are you ever angry, bad tempered or irritable?

Have you called anyone derogatory names? Do you use foul language?

Have you derided any that are disabled, poor, old or in some way disadvantaged?

Have you entertained bad feelings, ill will or hatred against anyone?

Have you forgiven those who have offended you?

Have you asked forgiveness from those whom you have offended?

Are you at peace with everyone?

Have you left the needy without help when you could have helped?

Have you attended the sick or elderly when they have asked you to do so?

Have you neglected to assist your priest at the House of God, your local parish?

Have you shown kindness and attention to all, remembering that God is expecting just such an attitude from you?

Have you hit animals without a cause or been cruel to them, or neglectful of those in your care?

Have you stolen anything?

Have you taken or used other people's things without asking?

Have you kept things that were lent you without returning them?

Have you borrowed money and not repaid it?

Have you wasted your employers' time or resources? Have you taken things from work for your own use, used the firm's phone or other facilities for your own purposes without permission or repayment?

Are you obstinate, and do you always try to have your own way?

Have you been inconsiderate of other people's feelings?

Have you tried to have your revenge against those who have offended you?

Have you harbored resentment? Have you deceived people?

Have you gossiped?

Have you told untruths?

Have you judged and condemned others?

Have you taken pains before approaching for confession to be reconciled with all?

Sins Against Yourself

Have you been proud? Do you boast of your abilities, achievements, family, connections or riches? Do you consider yourself worthy before God?

Are you vain, ambitious? Do you try to win praise and glory?

Do you bear it easily when you are blamed, scolded or treated unjustly? Do you think too much about your looks, outward appearance and the impression you make?

Have you sinned in thought, word or deed, by a look or glance, or in any other way against the seventh commandment? (Adultery, fornication, all extra-marital sexual relationships with others, masturbation, engaging in unnatural sexual acts, fantasizing, pornography, etc.)

Have you envied anyone anything? Have you been over-sensitive? Have you been lazy? Have you done your duties eagerly?

Have you wasted your time, energy or abilities in things that do not profit the soul? Have you become obsessive about anything? Have you been despondent or listless? Have you had thoughts of committing suicide?

Have you brought a curse on yourself or others or ill-wished them, being impatient? Have you a weakness for alcohol? Have you drunk too much, or become dependent on drink? Have you taken drugs, other than necessary medicines? Have you smoked?